

THE PLAIN VIEW

*A Quarterly Journal
concerned with human relations and with the quality of living*

WINTER 1949

Knowing and Believing

PATRICK BENNER

Wanting to Live on Earth

URSULA EDGCUMBE

Karl Jaspers' Philosophy of Existence

H. J. BLACKHAM

Pacifism

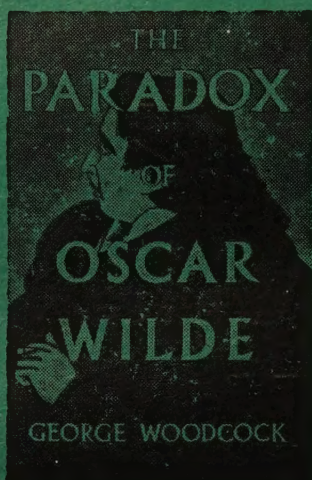
G. I. BENNETT

Commentary, Book Reviews, and Correspondence

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UBERTATES ET COPIAE VIRTUTIS

—CICERO

the productiveness and the resources of human quality

THIS IS THAT WHICH WILL INDEED DIGNIFY AND EXALT KNOWLEDGE, IF CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION MAY BE MORE NEARLY AND STRAITLY CONJOINED AND UNITED TOGETHER THAN THEY HAVE BEEN; A CONJUNCTION LIKE UNTO THAT OF THE TWO HIGHEST PLANETS, SATURN THE PLANET OF REST AND CONTEMPLATION, AND JUPITER, THE PLANET OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND ACTION.

—BACON

What the plain view perceives is neither obvious nor obscure

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COMMENTARY

A FREETHINKER. Last year's quater-centenary of the birth of Giordano Bruno was commemorated this September by the World Union of Freethinkers at their international congress in Rome. Bruno is a dim figure in this country to-day, yet he spent two and a half years of his maturity here in the course of his wanderings, and it was in London in 1584 that he published his classical Italian writings, the three principal works which contain the core of his philosophy. As a martyr of freethought, he is seen in a new perspective to-day. Forty-five years ago, in 1904, when an earlier congress of the World Union was held in Rome, an occasion of distinguished personalities and resounding declarations, of confidence and triumph, he could be taken as a hero of the renaissance, breaking with the middle ages, going behind the church and Aristotle to take up again the themes and the inspiration of the pre-socratics and join them to the new impulse of physical science, a pioneer of the highway of modern scientific progress. To-day his words are read in a more sombre context, and have not merely an historical but mainly a universal meaning: he speaks for mankind everywhere and always against all authoritarian systems. Others, a notable example was George Dimitrov, have spat defiance under their own flag at embattled power, and won the love and admiration of free men. Bruno fought not only for his own doctrine and against his enemies, but also, and with emphasis, for free thought and against the power to persecute. What he asked for, what he was abundantly grateful for where it was allowed him, was "spotless philosophical liberty" (*liberta filosofica illibata*), what in another tradition has been called the liberty of prophesying, what in his own tradition, recalling his sacred epithet *illibata*, has been called by one of his countrymen prominent at the conference of 1904, "the irreplaceable religions" (Croce: "The eager critical constructive labour of the mind in liberty is the historical force, the irreplaceable religion"). Bruno understood that the issue was not the question of truth, when he said to his judges: "You vote against me with more fear perhaps than I feel." He was an eclectic, ever ready to rebuke the pretensions of exclusive systems, and anxious in his own thinking to find the way to a religious unity, to one world, and therefore no less opposed to the fanaticisms of the sects of the Reformation than to that of Rome.

Idealists like Bruno are crushed like butterflies by the power-machines which demand exclusive ideological systems and stand or fall with them, unless the moral sentiment of free men rallies

to their call and is mobilized against these intolerable pretensions. We must not be hypocritical. Of course the Roman Church threatens sanctions against its adherents who favour communism. Of course communist governments work relentlessly and ceaselessly to reduce and eliminate the influence of Rome in their states. The condemnation of these policies is as naïve as the remark of the traveller proverbially ridiculed in the comic song:

Cet animal est très méchant :
Quand on l'attaque, il se défend.

The only point worth making is that where such systems are tolerated by the moral sentiment of mankind, free-thinkers can only be martyrs; and if there is no response to their witness, they are as ephemeral and as trivial in a serious world as butterflies.

We have lost our faith in liberty, that is, the exultant faith of poets, historians, and philosophers of the nineteenth century. Such faith as we have is itself shackled by reservations and under the surveillance of second thoughts. The modern declaration of rights is not a revolutionary document but a diplomatic protocol issued in an emergency by the heads of united peoples. The modern formula for liberty is not political but metaphysical, "man condemned to be free" (Sartre). It would be silly to sneer. The four freedoms are substantial and necessary goods; our inescapable responsibility for ourselves is a salutary reminder, and a new beginning. Neither can we go back to the passionate aspirations of an unfree age, nor can we be content with a positive freedom doled out by the state, and an inevitable freedom that is a burden of anxiety. Love of liberty, when it is not rebellion against the lack of liberty, is love, promotion, and protection of a common order which nurses activities in which we delight. Such spontaneous, active, jealous attachment to the life we live and to its common ground is fully as possible in a modern socialist state as in any other. Whether a socialist state evokes such liberty or destroys it is an issue that lies with the people and turns on their own activity. Only a community of active people who want to live and know how to live can keep free, or need freedom. "... when the question is heard whether liberty will enjoy what is known as the future, the answer must be that it has something better still: it has eternity." Croce cannot mean that it will ever be established; he can only mean that it will always be the issue, because man is liberty—or nothing.

It is well to glance also at the other side of the medal, which proclaims the truth that man is the maker of men, that it is not only the labour of the mind in liberty that is the seminal historical

force, but also the domination of men by, say, the Etruscans or the Normans. To say that it is the liberty of positive qualities that is of value is heresy in the religion of liberty. But all religions are liable to superstition.

THE STUDENT. He was loquacious. His voice was always to be heard running on tonelessly whilst we waited in the corridors or in the lecture theatre. He repeated the good things of his latest essay, the epigram which made it start off or conclude with a bang, the general lines of treatment, the felicitous quotation, the audacious argument. The happenings of the day, to the nation at large, to the student body in particular, or to himself personally, always invited his speculation and comment. If there was a background to be filled in, an interpretation required, it was there: he put it in, as large as life and twice as natural. For he was an easygoing comfortable sort of fellow who made the best of things. When a day in the country had brought it home to him that his eyesight was failing for country views, he went over it all, concluding that one couldn't have everything, and having chosen a bookish habit of life he had chosen well. When the professor or some recent writer had been dealing rather arduously with the problem of Wordsworth's conclusions on the great questions of life, he gave it as his opinion that Wordsworth reached no conclusions but simply gave it up like everybody else. He was affable on all occasions. Lounging before the Dean for a consultation on studies, he was told peremptorily and with great irritation: "Take your hands out of your pockets, and say, Sir, when you speak;" and obligingly and cheerfully replied, "O.K."

He was going to be a journalist, and was always rehearsing the scenes of his coming career; the joys and the pains, what was required and where he would not fit in and what would happen to him. Of course he had his political opinions, which he was ever ready to express and explain. When he got the promise of a job on a daily paper rather to the right of his own views, he was very content, telling us what it would have been like if he had had to go to a paper of another colour altogether. The finals came, and he passed out with a third-class, showing no trace of disappointment and making it seem the most reasonable event in history.

Twenty years on, his contemporaries remember him, a vague enough figure, a gray ghost, but the voice runs on tonelessly, the only voice of our day, our own consciousness, like the daily press succeeding by its copiousness, its garrulity, saying the only things that get said, or remembered, becoming our own consciousness.

KNOWING AND BELIEVING

WE are told that Pilate, having asked what truth is, did not stay for an answer. In this he may have been wise, for it is not likely that he would have received great enlightenment even if he had waited. The problem was certainly not a new one then, and has been troubling us ever since; no conclusive answer to it has yet been given, and perhaps one never will be found which is satisfactory to everyone. The problems which cannot be definitely solved are often the most important, and this one is no exception to the rule; it is, indeed, part of the more general problem of the nature and extent of human knowledge—what sorts of things can we know? Can we ever be certain, and how can we know that we know? This is the kind of question I wish to touch on here; I hope to suggest a possible approach to epistemology, and then to see how the theoretical conclusions square with the practical attitude which goes by the name of Rationalism.

I

The theory of knowledge may conveniently be approached by a brief examination of philosophical rationalism, as expounded by, say, Descartes. Descartes' work was done during the earlier part of the seventeenth century, which was a time when science, and in particular mathematics, began to take great strides forward. Man-kind seems always to desire certainty, and this, together with a definitely æsthetic attraction, partly accounts for the fascination of mathematics. The mathematician selects a number of simple premisses and then, by deductive reasoning, draws forth from them a series of conclusions which seem completely new (i.e. they are "discovered") but which are uncontroversial; they are, in fact, unquestionably true. It was not unnatural for men to conclude that the same method should be employed in all studies, so that sure conclusions could be reached in every section of the field of knowledge. Such was Descartes' ideal; he thought that a number of certain, because self-evident, premisses could be found, and that from them all physical, mechanical, medical and moral knowledge could be deduced. The word "deduced" must be emphasised; Descartes required absolute certainty, and realised that it could be achieved only by the aid of deduction, since the senses were notoriously unreliable and could never yield sure conclusions.

Philosophical rationalism founders on two rocks. In the first place, the premisses for the deductive process cannot be established, and in the second, deduction alone is found inadequate. To establish his first principles, Descartes had to rely on intuition; his original idea was that he had to discover something absolutely

simple (i.e. structureless), since only what was structureless could be intuited with absolute certainty. He therefore tried to make such concepts as straight, equal, unity, like, etc. his first principles, but soon found that deduction requires for its premisses, not structureless concepts, but propositions. But propositions are not simple because they have a structure—e.g. "X entails Y"—and therefore certainty is lost. It then becomes necessary to find something which, though not structureless, can be known intuitively to be necessarily true; and Descartes thought that the intuited proposition: "I think, therefore I exist," gave him what he required. But he was wrong, for the judgment that that proposition was true presupposed the essentially empirical, or experiential, knowledge of what is meant by "I" and what by "thought." Without it, there was no justification for saying: "The present objects of my consciousness are selfhood and thought respectively." Hence he failed to establish necessarily true premisses, and thereby condemned philosophical rationalism to failure. But his system would in any case have failed owing to its emphasis on deduction; Descartes found—and admitted—that from such premisses as "I think therefore I exist" and "I exist therefore God exists," it is impossible to deduce highly detailed knowledge—for example, the precise way in which glass is produced. This is so, he thought, because the first principles are so general that there are several ways in which detailed items of knowledge can be deduced, and he concluded that one can only decide which answer is the correct one by experiment. But certainty is yielded by deduction alone, and is destroyed if it becomes necessary to rely on empirical methods. And so the effort to achieve certainty by means of intuition and deductive reasoning ended in failure; Descartes was unable successfully to apply mathematical method to other branches of knowledge, since he failed to show that necessary propositions could be framed about existing things.

We now think that it is impossible to frame such propositions, basing our arguments upon the distinction drawn by Leibniz soon afterwards between those propositions which are about existing things and therefore are not necessarily true (i.e. their converse is not logically contradictory) and those which are necessarily true but are not about existing things. Let us take an example of the first type; let us suppose that I have been to the cinema six times, and that each time I have fallen asleep. I then say to a friend: "When I go to the cinema, I fall asleep." This proposition is not necessarily true, for no contradiction would be involved in thinking that on the seventh occasion I might stay awake—in other words, one cannot be certain that the proposition "When I go to the cinema, I fall asleep" will always hold good. Now consider

the proposition "The interior angles of a rectangle are equal to four right-angles." Once we are given the "raw materials" of geometry (definitions of points, lines, etc.) and the definition of a rectangle, it is inconceivable that the proposition should be untrue; a logical contradiction would be involved in the proposition "It is not the case that the interior angles of a rectangle are equal to four right-angles." All this is true even if no rectangle actually exists: it is true once I have, in my mind, framed the necessary definitions.

This distinction is vitally important. It shows that only when we are not dealing with existences can we achieve certainty; only then does deduction, which is the highroad to certainty, enjoy absolute sway. Empirical propositions are of a completely different nature. Hume showed that our so-called reasoning about existing things ("matters of fact") rests largely on the cause-effect relationship, and that reasoning, or at least deductive reasoning, does not allow us to pronounce that A must necessarily have B for its effect, or that B must necessarily have been caused by A. All we can say is that in the past we have observed that A has always been followed by B; in consequence we form the mental habit of expecting B when we see A, and come to believe that the two are causally connected. On the other hand, there would be no contradiction—that is, no logical contradiction—if on one occasion B did not follow A. Here, then, we depart from the realm of certainty, and reasoning, having been compelled to abandon the deductive ideal, takes on a different aspect. Human knowledge can thus be divided into two parts; in one, conclusions are certain, or necessarily true, but are not about existing things—in this group come mathematics and logic; in the other, conclusions are about existing things, but they depend on empirical methods and are not necessarily true—in this group are included the physical sciences.

Now let us come forward two centuries to the present day and consider the modern doctrine known as Logical Positivism, which derives largely from Hume. The twofold division of propositions I have been referring to is accepted. On the one hand we have necessary propositions, which are not about existing things but cannot be denied without self-contradiction. They are linguistically necessary, because they derive their validity from definitions (this is especially obvious in the case of geometry), and they are, in a rather special sense, tautologically true. This is because, being obtained by deduction from premisses, they must in some obscure way have been contained in those premisses, which might be regarded as a shorthand way of writing down all the propositions later derived from them—for example, the proposition "The

interior angles of a triangle are equal to 180° " is said to be tautologous because equality of the interior angles to 180° was in some way contained in the original definition of a triangle. And on the other hand there are existential propositions; these are really hypotheses, which are validated by seeing whether or not they enable us to predict experience; in other words, it can never be shown conclusively that they are true, but good empirical evidence can be brought forward showing that they very probably are. This classification of propositions gives us a means of deciding whether a given statement is true or not; we have to ask: "Is it tautologically true? If not, can it be validated empirically, and do the empirical observations bear it out or not?" Intuition having been discredited, these remain as the only tests for truth. It is worth noting in passing that the Logical Positivist owes much to scientific method; like the scientist, he treats existential propositions as hypotheses which must be empirically verified, and if the observations are not what were expected, he assumes that it was the hypothesis which was wrong and alters it—he does not produce numerous subsidiary hypotheses to explain the deviation. It must be admitted, however, that this picture is over-simplified. For example, we should not normally say that "All men are mortal" is a tautologically true proposition; yet if we found someone whom we had always regarded as a man not to be mortal, our conclusion would almost certainly be that our first judgment was incorrect and that he was not a man after all. This does not vitiate our division of propositions into two basic categories, but it does show that in common usage the distinction between them is not so clear as we might like to think.

So far, I consider that Logical Positivism is in general correct. But it ventures on to much more dubious ground when it goes on to tell us that propositions which are neither tautologically true nor capable, at least in theory, of empirical verification, are literally meaningless. It is claimed that the most typical examples of meaningless propositions are to be found among the utterances of metaphysicians, and so the terms "meaningless" and "metaphysical" are used almost indifferently. This is rather startling. The ordinary person thinks he attaches literal meaning to such propositions as "God is omnipotent," or "The State has a corporate personality;" he may well think them false—but it is odd to think false a statement which is meaningless. In fact, the attack on metaphysics amounts to very little. According to the Logical Positivist, philosophy is not concerned with existing things; its propositions are analytic (i.e. tautologous) and therefore necessarily true, because it is dealing only with definitions and the implications of definitions. When, therefore, we are told that a sentence

is meaningless when it is neither tautologically true nor empirically verifiable, we are being given a definition of "meaningless"; the author is not describing the properties of things, but is merely warning us that this is how he must be understood when he uses the word "meaningless." But there is no constraining force in a definition, and anyone is free to say that he disagrees with the definition because it is misleading owing to its wide divergency from common usage; he might admit that the truth or falsity of "metaphysical" propositions is very much a matter of opinion, but would add that this does not seem to warrant the conclusion that it is convenient to describe them as "meaningless." Personally, I should agree with such objections, both for the reasons given and for others which I will now explain.

It is pertinent to ask whether metaphysical statements do, as Logical Positivists think, fall neatly into a separate class. The answer seems to be that they do not, since they are in some way connected with empirical factors. Propositions about God or about the State are not conjured up out of nothing, but are related to experience and observation; people think of God because they have marvelled at the order of nature or have undergone some mystical experience; they think of the State as a personality because they have noticed how groups of people differ or realized that group behaviour and individual behaviour are quite different. Therefore one cannot divorce so-called "metaphysical" propositions from experience; but if that is so, there seems much less justification for calling them meaningless. It must, of course, be admitted that we cannot make any sure judgments about their truth or falsity; one simple observation will confirm whether or not the sun rises in the east, but the existence of God cannot be confirmed (or the reverse) in this way. On the other hand, most people would agree that certain experiences and observations are relevant when the question of His existence is being considered, though they would probably not agree on the precise weight to be attached to those observations and experiences considered as pieces of evidence for or against His existence. Here, then, we meet a further difficulty, that of deciding just what it is that constitutes empirical verification. Therefore it seems that, although there certainly is a distinction between "metaphysical" and other propositions, it is not the absolute difference in kind envisaged by the Logical Positivists, and that we therefore have additional reasons for saying that "metaphysical" should not be identified with "meaningless." Let me conclude this section of the argument with an illustration. Consider the following four sentences:—

(1)—The interior angles of a triangle are equal to 180° .

(2)—Oak trees lose their leaves in the autumn.

(3)—God is omnipotent.

(4)—Pobbles are happier without their toes.

The Logical Positivist says that (3) and (4) are meaningless. It is being maintained here that only (4) is meaningless, though so far as truth is concerned (3) is in a different category from (1) and (2).

II

This argument has, it must be admitted, been summary and rather sketchy, but perhaps enough has been said for us to use the tentative conclusions reached for an examination of modern Rationalism. Rationalism is a much-abused word which can mean everything or nothing, and all sorts and conditions of men choose at times to style themselves "Rationalists." But space is limited, and I shall therefore confine myself to a few somewhat random observations.

In the first place, let us note that there is no theoretical justification for the narrow sort of Rationalist who condemns as what he is pleased to call "mysticism" or "mumbo-jumbo" those views with which he is in disagreement. Such a one is often a shallow person who is too fearful—or too vain—to admit the existence of mystery and the unknown; for him, it is a great convenience to be able to sweep away everything which has a tang of "metaphysics" on the ground that it is meaningless and therefore not deserving of serious attention. I have tried to show that "metaphysics" cannot be banned in this way; and to say that it can is to make a "metaphysical" assertion. The man who says "'Metaphysics' is nonsense," presumably does not intend to give utterance to a tautology; and if he does not, his own premisses require that his statement should be capable of empirical verification—but that is impossible. Hence the Rationalist who says this, and is not merely giving a verbal definition, is involving himself in self-contradiction. Someone may now object that this is mere logic-chopping: I have admitted that the truth or falsehood of "metaphysical" statements is usually an open question, so is not the Rationalist in practice doing us a very good turn by advising us to avoid all such statements like the plague? To that, my reply is simply: "No." It seems to me to be one of the lessons of experience that, of the most important problems we encounter, by far the greater proportion have no definite solution, for there are no answers which are known to be true or false; and yet the problems cannot for that reason be burked or explained away as fancies. It is impossible to live in the world without encountering ethical problems—indeed, our relations with other people always have an ethical aspect—and there can be hardly anyone who has not at some time said to himself: "The question is, not what do I want to do, but what *ought*

I to do?" Whatever one may think about moral imperatives, one cannot identify "want" with "ought." Again, we cannot avoid political problems; we are constantly having to consider whether liberty is valuable, how it should be evaluated in comparison with equality, and so on; these problems are essentially moral ones, for morals and politics are closely connected. And they are problems we would not wish people to ignore, for in a democratic state it is thought desirable that people should have opinions on such subjects—and how can they not, even if in a rudimentary way, seeing how intimately they are affected by the manner in which society is organized?

The Rationalist might then say that he quite agrees, but that ethics, politics and the rest are matters for the scientist. Now it is true that the scientist can be very helpful in these spheres; indeed, his services are often indispensable, for he is often the person best able to tell us what consequences are likely to follow from a given course of action, or how a certain state of affairs may be brought about. But he is not necessarily better qualified than the next man to say, once the attendant facts are known, if those consequences are desirable or that state of affairs ought to be produced. Such judgments are, I submit, not scientific, but may fairly be called moral.* This implies that there is no "right" answer which can be established by observation, but it does *not* imply that we should not endeavour to be objective and to take into account all the relevant evidence—but there are no certain tests of objectivity and relevance.

As a final objection, it may be said that the scientist (usually the psychologist) can explain how and why we make the ethical (and æsthetic) judgments we do; and it is often thought that this not only explains ethics and æsthetics, but explains them away. The implications of this are very far-reaching, but little space remains, so I will make only two remarks. If the claims of the psychologist are justified, we must be subject to necessity; morals are therefore illusory, for there is no sense in saying "Smith ought to do X," if either he cannot help doing X or it is impossible for him to do X. But I do not think that we are in this way subject to necessity; and if we are not, the claims of the scientist cannot be in all respects justified. In the second place, there is a great difference between explaining ethics in terms of science and replacing it by science. One might explain how another man makes an ethical judgment; but the fact that my explanation is scientific does

* I am referring here to ethics in general; this should certainly not be taken as an argument in favour of objective ethical values, against which the arguments are overwhelmingly strong.

not mean that his judgment is also scientific—the activity called “making an ethical judgment” still survives.

It is quite certain that we all of us entertain beliefs which cannot be shown to be justified; in the ordinary conduct of life, we are bound to develop various principles of conduct and attitude, be they tacit or clearly formulated. I have tried to show that such beliefs cannot usually be conclusively validated, but that they are nevertheless of vital importance. But we do need to try to base them on objective thought, upon a careful examination of all the evidence which is relevant, and above all upon open-mindedness—the willingness to change our opinions should the facts demand it and to admit that we were wrong in attributing too little weight to considerations later seen to be highly important. The Rationalist is much to blame if he falls into that blind dogmatism from which he above all people ought to be free, or if he falls down and worships an omnipotent Science as earlier generations have worshipped a transcendent God. He should at all times remember that certainty is rarely attainable, that to few questions is there only one possible answer and that the fact that someone disagrees with him as to the precise weight to be attached to a certain piece of evidence does not mean that that person must be a fool or a knave. The lesson of tolerance is a hard one to learn; and when a man abuses tolerance by calling it “indifference” or “empty-headedness,” we may know that he is a poor scholar.

In conclusion, I would commend some words written by John Locke in his “Essay on the Human Understanding”*:—

“The assuming an authority of dictating to others, and a forwardness to prescribe to their opinions, is a constant concomitant of this bias and corruption of our judgments: for how can it be otherwise, but that he should be ready to impose on others’ belief who has already imposed on his own? Who can reasonably expect arguments and conviction from him in dealing with others, whose understanding is not accustomed to them in his dealing with himself? who does violence to his own faculties, tyrannizes over his own mind, and usurps the prerogative that belongs to truth alone, which is to command assent by only its own authority, i.e., by and in proportion to that evidence which it carries with it.”

PATRICK BENNER

* “Essay” IV, 19, §2

WANTING TO LIVE ON EARTH

THE humanist view of the world differs from other widely held views, such as Christianity, Marxism, or Buddhism, by being without formulated doctrines. There are people who, having grown up in the Christian teaching, later drop all belief in its theology and, being rationalists, are willing to call themselves humanists without giving any precise meaning to the word. Because of this indefiniteness many Christians assume that humanism is a view very much like their own but without its most valuable part: Christianity minus deity. This conception sounds absurd to a person who having found Christianity unsatisfactory has become a humanist. Living in this country at this time, the humanist who finds that the contentment of his life derives from his view may, when he recognizes that he is an object of pity to the Christian, want to explain that the pity is misplaced and that he is not poorer but richly other than the Christian. This essay will attempt to show some small part of what a humanist view can mean in the life of an ordinary person.

The animals appear to succeed in finding contentment; man having worried himself by inconclusive half-thinking lost this contentment and attempts to think his way back. It is hard to be a furless two-legged animal with the experience of frustration and conflict and knowing too much about future possibilities, seeing the inevitability of death and the possibility of suffering. Man begins by living in the most instinctive way, more conscious of his own wants and of satisfying them than of anything else. He is permanently set in this state, if he moves from it accidentally it is by finding some absorbing interest outside himself. Otherwise the way out can only be by his own effort, by taking thought.

The humanist believes that escape from a too natural unconsidered way of living can be achieved out of human resources: that man can himself create the most important part of his life. Not that that would necessarily be good, for he might do it wildly and unrealistically if he did not take the main lines of his direction from the fund of universal experience. It is common human experience that there is a small area of known basic agreement shared by the people who make any sensitive, reasonable effort towards finding it out. There is voluminous proof that there can be no verifiable truth known without scientific curiosity and scientific method, and no social harmony nor self-fulfilment without a certain detachment, and that æsthetic values will be lost by disregarding empty abstract values such as proportion, balance, completeness, and the like. It is the empty abstract values of the good will and the unbiased mind which in the end

are able to prove their absoluteness in relation to human life, because none of the finest human achievements would have been possible working contrary to these values.

One knows that a person for the most part lives spontaneously, chiefly directed by his responses to what he experiences, and that responses lead to discoveries, refinements, and new initiatives. This in the perfect person would be all that is wanted, but because of human imperfections the person does usually make some self-critical examination of the way he responds to the world; and if he is a humanist he would do so by using empty concepts rather than by the more childish way of applying precise precepts. Precepts are necessary rules of thumb and the most that can be hoped of them is that they are applicable in the majority of cases. The use of precepts is best justified when all else fails: it may be necessary to say to a very young child, "Do this," "Do not do that," because the alternative of recognizing why this is good or not good to do in a particular case needs both a reasoning mind and a certain amount of past experience, neither of which the child has.

It is the humanist's strong point that he needs no especial revelation. What actually is exemplifies the better and the worse, so that his view is of the world and fits it. He cannot live wisely unless he shows interest in the nature of the world itself, endeavouring to find out what is there, what he can enjoy of it, what he can change, make use of, and create out of the given, and gain lasting satisfaction in so doing. The thoughtful person asks, What ought I to do? and, What makes the struggle to live seem worth while? The neat and ready-made answers will not do. The humanist answer to these questions will be known when the person finds out for himself the values within existence.

At the first levels of thought, mind when it becomes conscious of a natural process it does not like, for instance death, makes some mental compensation, invents a theory to redress the balance. The mature mind is less like the child crying for the moon, for it recognizes that what delights one in the world is inextricably woven into that which pains one, and that the world in spite of all one's wishes, is what it is; and the only way to live successfully is to attempt to know its nature and relate oneself to what is. An infant asking for and stretching out its arms towards the large marble clock on the nursery mantelpiece is no more foolish than is humanity when it demands immutability. The infant does not know that its puny arms would give way under the weight of the heavy clock; the man may recognize that he is conditioned by time, that it is possible to hear a Mozart quartet played too often, or that a holiday could, even if it were of the

kind nearest to his desires, last too long; and because this saddens him he demands something he thinks he wants: a future existence in which the best and the constant are one. It is better to admit that what Professor Whitehead calls "perpetual perishing" is the very condition which makes it possible for transitory things to fulfil themselves in ways which give life its final values.

The refusal to accept the fact of mutability has been a great factor in undervaluing the world. The passing of good things has been a cause of despair and caused the question, *What is the use of anything?* Even the prosperous have lost heart. It was not enough to be a rich young man; one remembers St. Augustine, Gautama, St. Francis, and Tolstoy, all born to riches and inheriting the culture of their time, all of them in the end to return the verdict, *All is vanity.*

Two things which most commonly prevent a simple living which would underlie a discovery of the value of life are wrong expectations, for example, a conviction that the real lies in the remote, and the natural return of minds at rest to a circling of thought among their self-interests: the rich young man after his enthusiasms have been tried and exhausted and his mind is no longer absorbed in the doing and pursuing of interests, having had enough and too much of what he most cared for, regretful for that which was appreciated and which now has passed, finds living no more than a taste of dust in the mouth, and his desire refocuses itself on any world but this. The humanist knows that a mind wandering aimlessly or enclosed in its own pre-occupations will have less contentment than the cow chewing the cud. He also knows he should not suffer much from this because he has a most useful and necessary employment which demands all the spare time he can give to it; for experience has convinced him that a truly human life can only be found in an equilibrium balanced by thought and action, without which he will live as a bewildered animal or a mere spectator of existence: therefore he lives constantly in alternation between direct experience and reflection upon it.

A person is saved from being the most discontented of animals when he does what no animal seems to be able to do, centres his interest outside himself. The dog lies in the sun, appearing to enjoy the sensations of warmth and light, its appreciation of the sun goes no further. The man also enjoys the light and warmth, but he may extend his interest to the sun itself. Man's appreciations are both simple and esoteric: the care for persons and objects of the natural world is open to everyone, the care for all intellectual pursuits, such as the arts, sciences, and philosophies, needs learning and application. It would take very

many lives to enjoy them all. The strength of a person is in relation to the depth and variety of his appreciations; if he does not care to think out their implications he forfeits what might have become the pivot of his living. For example, there is no force in the idea of preserving the countryside unless one knows what being in the country feels like and in some ways what it means to one. The sense of direction is felt after the enjoyment of values.

There has been some innate human longing to prove that the world is not what it seems to be, to find that there exists some final perfection which, if known, would reveal a guide to live by and make the enjoyment of experience unnecessary. This has led away from the way of living which would make a humanist view inevitable. The humanist stands in contrast with all the believers in an ultimate good for whom the present is but a road of approach; for to him the present is the centre. If the present at its best cannot contain value enough, then there is no certainty that any future time will. His interest in the future is not because he expects to find perfections in it different in quality from those known in the present, at least not different in the way imperishable flowers would be different from the growing and decaying flowers he already knows. Because of his satisfaction in parts of existence he plans for a future when that can be increased and made more accessible and branch out into new varieties.

The humanist lives in an especial way. He does not believe that final perfections are static. He expects to find all he will ever know of perfection on the way, in the moment, either if it contains infinite value in itself or by its providing the land on which to stand from which the past is seen and into which it merges, and from which the mind looks out to a vision of the future. Because of this he does not let the ordinary present slip through his fingers, and it is not unlikely that present happenings make a deeper impression on him than upon the person whose mind has its greatest interest in the remote and the extraordinary. Immediate experience makes its impression upon everyone and may be remembered. The poets have expressed much about the nostalgia of remembering loved things which can no longer be known. A sweet and bitter melancholy does not make this kind of memory much use to its possessor.

The humanist, who is bound (if he is to make his view a satisfactory one) to live constantly in alternation between experiencing and thinking over this experience, consciously makes of his remembered impression something different from memory at its commonest: he establishes within his mind that which was worth most to him in his experience so that it becomes a permanent

possession, as actual a treasure as the cups and saucers in the cupboard. This is no trivial or sophisticated game for those who like it. It really is necessary to the humanist; by means of it he finds what direction to take, and in it he lives outside the flux of things, has another view, one in which he is detached although still participating in living; for he is wise enough to avoid the mistaken detachment of the spectator.

Enjoyment in immediate experience is mostly sensation, and the person being a participant is attached; in thinking over the experience it is known differently and the person being no longer in the experience is detached. Humanism does not consider the life of sensation to be animal and the life of detachment to be spiritual, as two alternative states, but knows that the two are not to be had singly without risk of perverting human life. Living is not quite real, is almost semi-deadness, without attachment, a total absorption during action being far better than the frequent alternative of half participating while the other half of the mind looks on. Contemplation follows the movement of action, establishing within the mind that which in experience was worth most, making it one's own, absorbing it so that hereafter it is in the mind, although below the surface, and becomes not so much what can be remembered as what must be remembered. That which in experience was just what it was, is weighed up in thought, related to other things and recognized as being worth more or less than they. By such a process the humanist creates his convictions and discovers his judgments. As this process is set going by the enjoyment of living, it is a serious matter when he loses his appetite for appreciating the present.

When things go well, when living is simple and without calamity, the person goes from one experience to another and what is worth most he attempts in some measure to repeat. When living goes badly, the chief joys can in no way be re-enacted and gradually the reality of the values which experience of these established becomes dim. The person tries to live by an extinguished light. It is then for the individual to know in which way he can best live, whether he will put his once known experience into a drawer and live simply from the experiences which still mean much in the present, or whether he must live without forgetting, more heroically and more sadly. Whichever way it is, it remains that he is sustained by experience of the worth of the world.

Most people are instinctively passive to their experience; they are too near the animals, have explored the possibilities of human living too little, to be interested in the view of humanism: they see no reason to value the world, therefore they still long for

a religion of consolation. Real appreciation is difficult. A dull unresponsiveness makes an opaque wall, and wrong expectations block the way. People expect a kind fortune to lay their experience at their feet and fit them with the apprehensions to enjoy it. They do not bother to find out why after a long journey preceded by its preparations and efforts their eyes see the effect of light on the Grand Canal at Venice better than they do if they walk out of their offices in the lunch hour and merely trespass on the towpath of the Grand Junction Canal in a London suburb.

Also there is the question, what is the incentive to think? And without thinking how can our assurance of values be more than an emotion? There is the human dislike of thinking, the natural result of finding it an effort. Even if enough thinking had been done to prove that there is a good case for a life centred in the present and balanced between thought and action, there still remains the preference for drift, the wish to have things both ways: the ease of drifting without its disadvantages.

URSULA EDGCUMBE

KARL JASPERS' PHILOSOPHY OF EXISTENCE*

I

BOTH Kierkegaard and Nietzsche compared themselves to a lonely pine. They were indeed, and perhaps in spite of themselves, solitaires: boulders which worked loose from the mass of human solidarity, and crashed to the bottom. In Karl Jaspers we see them deflecting the course of traditional philosophy. For Jaspers is the professional philosopher inheriting and handling the classical tradition of philosophy (*philosophia perennis*) and at the same time profoundly influenced by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. He treats them as the great exceptions. He is not a disciple (they cannot be followed), but he makes it his enterprise to profit by their intuitions and apply them to the business of philosophy. This enterprise, however, is not clever, it is not philosophical journalism; Jaspers is a philosopher (he was a physician) because he is a man reflecting upon his own effort to live and living in the light of his reflections.

Philosophy, Jaspers feels, cannot be the same after Kierkegaard and Nietzsche because they have awakened us to our human condition, as Hume changed philosophy by awakening us to the

* Jaspers' chief work is *Philosophie* (3 vols.), Berlin, 1932. Since the war he has published a bulky first volume of a vast Philosophical Logic, *Von der Wahrheit*. The only translation of his work into English is *The European Spirit* (S.C.M., 1948), a paper given at a congress in Geneva in 1946, and characteristic of his thought.

state of our knowledge. Theirs is a challenge to our assumptions about ourselves as persons. They have raised the question, what does it mean to be a human being; and what does it mean to be a christian, or not to be a christian? But their approach also put in question philosophy itself, for how can descriptions and formulations have universal validity and intelligibility and remain close to the authenticity and even eccentricity of individual experience? How can philosophy supply the norms which individual experience seeks, if it confines itself to the evocative value, the appeal and witness, of individual experience? Can there be philosophy, or only autobiography?

Classical philosophy comes to an end in Hegel, because it is impossible any more to construct intellectual totalitarian systems in which everything is taken up, harmonized, rationalized, and justified. Such palaces are still marvellous, but nobody can live in them. The savour and reality of human existence, its perils and triumphs, its bitterness and sweetness, are outside in the street.*

Nevertheless, the reaction against metaphysics has not yet brought anything better, nearer to the plenitude and reality of experience. Some have resolved philosophy into science, that is to say, made philosophical claims for science or sought a philosophy of life in science. Others have resorted again to religious dogma, to save the life of the emotions and the imagination. This superstitious cult of science or of religion can only be remedied by a return to philosophy. But that will make confusion worse confounded unless philosophy has learned its lesson: it must know how to define the limits of science and at the same time recognize that science is the definition and standard of objective knowledge. Philosophy cannot again pretend to be universal knowledge. We have lost our naïvety; for we recognize the discontinuities in the realm of Being, which the old systems took as one and treated as the object of universal knowledge. The modern starting-point, and the strength of our position, is in the recognition of this discontinuity between the three forms of Being: being-there, being-oneself, being-in-itself.† These forms of being are explored by

* Cp. Simone de Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 221, "I remember having felt a great calm in reading Hegel in the impersonal setting of the Bibliothèque Nationale, in August 1940. But when I found myself again in the street, in my life, outside the system, under a real sky, the system was no longer any use to me: it was, under the pretext of the infinite, the consolations of death which it had offered me; and I still wanted to live in the midst of living men."

† These distinctions are of course not peculiar to Jaspers or to Existentialists; it is by their doctrines and treatment of *phenomena*, of *self-consciousness*, and of *substance* that philosophies get their specific character and difference.

different methods. The person living his life participates in all three. Philosophy must make and keep the separation and develop the methods of exploration appropriate to each.

II

Jaspers starts with the assumption that there is a given external world in which the thinker has foothold, a world of stable objects which compel and control the adherence of knowledge. This world of science is one in which everything known is an object (in the sense that it is experienced as stable and registered in a communicable representation), and is objective (in the sense that what is known about it is universally intelligible and accepted). Science, then, is a relation between an intelligible world and human understanding as such: "all knowledge and every object in the world is for consciousness in general."

This objective knowledge of what is there (being-there) is assumed by many to be the whole ambition of human thought, because it is assumed that there is nothing which is not given in stable objects registered in the human mind in representations which in logical order are universally intelligible and communicable. Therefore science is the measure of all things. "This objective certainty which maintains itself without my concurrence, and before which every form of my subjectivity has no standing and is dissolved, is the very image of all that is solid. In laying hold of it I feel an incomparable satisfaction." The quest for certainty is supported by the fear of liberty; for the anxieties and risks of personal responsibility and decision are escaped if all can be reduced to a necessary and universal objectivity: liberty and choice imply the imperfection of knowledge—uncertainty. Descartes, on the threshold of modern philosophy, enunciating his *Cogito*, announced himself as an individual thinker looking out upon the world from his necessary solitude, an existentialist, but went on to refuse to take the risks inseparable from his recognized position, and took refuge from himself in dogmas: his pronouncement turned out to be merely a recourse of method, not a personal recognition of the possibility of despair, and the reality of liberty.

In what way does the objective knowledge established by science fall short? Reason is not satisfied with clarity, and aims also at unity and totality of knowledge. Objectivity, fully realized, is knowledge complete and exclusive. Science is incapable in principle of achieving this.

If this objectivity were realized the world would be exhaustively intelligible to human consciousness as such. But there are vital forms of consciousness lying, as it were, above and below the level of public knowledge and incapable of being wholly reduced to its

forms and norms: the more or less obscure and fugitive sensations, perceptions, feelings, intuitions of the private consciousness, which are in part the raw material of public knowledge and in part intractable and answerable to irreducible peculiarities of the objective world; and the uniquely personal self-determinations of the free personality. These vitally important elements pass through the mesh of the most resourceful and perfected science.

Further, inductive knowledge can never be more than probable, and in some fields must remain indefinite. It cannot have either a beginning or an end. It is impossible to form out of scientific concepts a coherent image of the world: it cannot be maintained that the world is at bottom number, or matter, or spirit, or energy, or any other comprehensive idea borrowed from any of the sciences studying a coherent body of phenomena. Nor can the sciences be systematized into a comprehensive system, although it must always remain a legitimate scientific enterprise to make the attempt. There is no science which can gain hegemony by subsuming all others under itself. Especially is there an irreducible difference between the sciences of nature and of man. The sciences of man, of which history is a type, are meaningless, a dust of unrelated facts, unless they are more than science, a reconstruction in which the mind of the scholar participates; and such an interpretation of the data can never be final. Ideas can never in any field of science be finally objective, in the sense of wholly taking the place of the individual facts to which they direct attention or which they summarize or which they elucidate.

The hope of complete objectivity is linked to the hope of utopia, a final victory over man's practical problems. Both are illusory; both imply the hope of reducing all things to mechanics and manufacture. Neither the world nor knowledge is a unity, not to say a unity of that kind. There is no refuge from the hazards of real life in such illusions.

Science, then, achieves the clarity and universality of objective knowledge, but cannot attain the unity and totality to which reason aspires. The sciences are empirical and must work as best they can. It is not for the philosopher to give them rules nor practical limits. The limits which he defines are ultimate principles; what they can achieve in their own fields is always open and indefinite. Science which understands itself and recognizes its ultimate limits is itself philosophy because it is animated by the same spirit, the will to know, the persistent attempt to think clearly, the quest for reality; and because there is no other world than the world which science describes.

Science is therefore the necessary ground and first stage of

philosophy, but is not capable of achieving the unity and totality which reason cannot renounce. Philosophy cannot add anything to the objective knowledge of science. Philosophy begins with the philosopher's existence, with what he is, not with what he knows; he achieves and communicates not knowledge but himself. The unity and totality which philosophy recognizes that science can never achieve belong to the world in its transcendence (being-in-itself), to which the thinker has access only by means of his own transcendence (being-oneself). The thinker participates in all three realms of being and by that means alone can attain the unity and totality to which his reason aspires, never by trying to reduce all three to the order of being-there. Nothing is more philosophical than science when it abjures metaphysics and is faithful in its attention to the facts, for in its docility and persistence it is then near the authentic reality to which it aspires. But to say this is to shift the accent from science to the scientific worker and to make science properly a specific manifestation of a person. Philosophy begins with science and cannot do without it, because there is no other world independent of the objective world which science explores. "Only one who has passionately given himself up to the exploration of the world can find access to philosophy." Philosophy which is an abstraction from the world is lost.

From his standpoint of the separation of the three orders of being, Jaspers is able to disentangle the confusion of philosophy and science which interferes with the effectiveness of each. Beginning with a criticism of this confusion in Descartes, he can show the dogmatism and vanity of positivism in reducing all philosophy to science, the sterility of idealism in reducing all science to philosophy, the fatal neglect of science in Kierkegaard's leap into transcendence, the stultification of philosophy by Nietzsche's importation of biological concepts. So strong is his position that he can treat the two most characteristic forms of confusion in the relations of science and philosophy, the reduction of one to the other, positivism and idealism, with generous appreciation of the truths and values for which each contends. The effect of his criticism is to dissolve the hard shell of unrecognized metaphysics which soon devitalizes science, to renew its tender empiricism, and to set free philosophy and bring it in not as doctrine but in the person of the philosopher, to take care of those aspects of existence in the world which are of the greatest importance but which are not fully reducible to objective knowledge.

III

The philosopher, then, concerned with these aspects of being which are inaccessible to science, begins, like Descartes, with his

own existence, turns from the public external world to the private world revealed to his own consciousness of himself; not, however, like Descartes, because this gives him a foothold in immediate certainty from which to walk out into the objective world, there is no continuity here with the objective world, but because here is the seat and source of his own life. He finds here not objectivity but liberty, not knowledge but choice. I am "a being who is not, but who can and ought to be." I have to found myself upon my own decisions consciously taken; and this is not an act done once for all, but one that has to be sustained by being perpetually renewed so long as I live.

Self-consciousness when it is thoroughly awakened is consciousness of my solitude and my liberty. When everything goes of itself and is taken for granted, the objective world hides me from myself. What am I? I cannot be wholly identified with or reduced to my body, my role in society, my actions, or even my character which is manifested in these aspects of me. At the bottom is my liberty, the source of possibilities, of what I will to be. Existence for me is this active choice of myself in liberty. If I do not come to myself and exercise my liberty in the realm of being-oneself, I remain in the realm of being-there, objectively determined, a thing. The emptiness of liberty, the recognition that I cannot find myself in the objective aspects of my existence, that I am not an object but a possible existence (not an I-am but a what-am-I? which resolves into what-shall-I-be?) to which I am awakened and to which I perpetually return so long as I maintain myself at the level of being-oneself, is "the consciousness of my essence."

When with this consciousness of essence I found myself in decisions and commitments, my choice is existential and absolute; it cannot be reduced to psychological explanation in terms of motives, or merely subsumed under a rational ethical principle: it is original, my choice of myself. To the self it has the sense of assurance, of inevitability: "it comes to him like a gift: it is clear, it is evident, now that it is decided it can never be other than simple: how has it been possible for doubt to last so long!" This unconditioned affirmation of the self in decisions and choice which shatters all doubt seems to be a scandal from the point of view of philosophy. The difficulty is this: unless I have an original essence which has some positive content and is not empty liberty, how can I found myself in decisions which are self-determined; how can I know what I am in order to become what I am, unless I have a positive essence, that is to say, a nature? The answer seems to be that the choices I make and sustain and by which I make myself constitute the consistent ground of further

spontaneous choice (not my nature, but my history). And beyond my first conscious decisions by which I constitute myself at the level of being-oneself, is an original self, obscure in origin but definite in actuality, rooted in a body and temperament and disposition and occupying a concrete situation in history, the self that exists at the level of being-there: this original self, I cannot choose because it is given, but I can assume it, that is to say, adopt it as mine, as me. I who exist in liberty by conscious separation from my empirical self adopt all that which is uniquely mine "as the manifested body of what I can be." I identify myself with myself and face and acknowledge the vital impulses of the body, the brute facts of nature, the obligations of duty, the limitations of my situation and of all chosen ends: these enter into my decisions, but I am not subdued to them, am not a resultant of their determinations; these are the conditions and resistances which maintain me in the flight of liberty, if I have the skill and the will. But the flight can never be completely successful. The fact that it is hampered can itself be interpreted. The effort at self-realization becomes self-transcendence by its very frustration.

"No choice without decision, no decision without will, no will without duty, no duty without being:" this formula shows choice proceeding from its source in myself, to which it also returns. Such choice is no hopping uncertainty before alternatives; it is elicited from me, it proceeds straight to its goal. It is a disciplined choice: duty has a place in the series, not above but next below the source; I am not under the ethical law, I adopt the ethical law; in proceeding from liberty withdrawn to liberty engaged I accept determination by law, and if I set aside one law I appeal to another ("the only universal is the law of legality in general"). To look for a law is already to be free from the causal nexus, to be an origin, to be concerned for value in the concrete decision. The matured self in which the law has been assimilated and has fertilized experience is inventive and of higher validity than the objective law because more inclusive. Thus the self is put above the law, as indeed it is by Kant. But the self is not identified with the law, as in Kant, as the law of my nature, my rational essence. My essence is liberty, I have no essence; that is the height and dizziness of my true position: suicide and defiance of the law are no less consistent with my essence, than assimilation of the law and sensitively informed choice and activity. It is for me to say what I will be. My consciousness of myself as having to choose, without being able to escape the responsibility by recourse to any objective determinant of any kind, breaks the objective determination of me as being-there and constitutes me an unconditioned self, a being-oneself. That is the summit of personal

existence to which I have constantly to return to renew the authenticity of myself in liberty.

(Existentialists are necessarily highly concerned with the subtle and complex relations between law and liberty, the objective norms of ethics and the subjective reality of the self and its exigencies. No simple statement of these relations is possible. Nietzsche is interested in the prolonged discipline of law as the indispensable means of maturing the vital grace of spontaneous movement in action and attitude, unconscious certainty in choice and decision; but this appreciation of the pragmatic value of law in the history of cultures and the production of types is supplemented by his ethical conception of the creation of values and of fidelity to oneself. Jaspers' conception both of the purgative value of law and of the ethical choice of the self is different. Submission to law is itself freedom in so far as it is a break with the unconscious determinants and a rise to the consciousness of value: but that puts all in question and leads on to choice. In choice, the self, knowing its liberty, its inescapable responsibility for itself, is not constrained by the law but adopts it in the given situation as the law of its own dispositions enabling it to become itself; the law is then a means, a mediation, explicative not reductive, maieutic, not external, magisterial, and sovereign. Thus existentialists, in so far as a formal theory of ethics is implied (or is possible) in their position, are ranged against the transcendentalists, intuitionists, objective idealists, and de-ontologists of all kinds, and are in the same camp with Kant and Hume who found the ethical principle in the nature of man rather than in the nature of things.)

The consciousness of its liberty which awakens the self to personal existence in the realm of being-onself is bound to a consciousness of itself as a self in the world, limited inescapably by its situation in the world, a situation which cannot be shared, which can only be known from within, and which, although it can be modified, cannot be changed into anything other than a situation in the world imposing narrow limits. I cannot change my parents or sex, nor altogether the fate and fortune of my lot in the world, but I can accept and adopt them and make them my own. This acceptance (in the realm of being-onself) is more than resignation, as submission to law is more than obedience; it is active and renewed and remains in constant tension with other possibilities. The unconditioned act of the self in assuming its concrete situation is always real and always significant, and the other possibilities always remain open: this tension, authentic being-onself, is the ethical situation at the heart of Jaspers' philosophy.

Ingredient in the concrete particular situation of every self are inescapable limitations inherent in the human situation, such as death, suffering, conflict, fault. The dream of immortality contains no reasonable hope whatever of my survival in any form linked in continuity of memory with my present self: there is no other world for me that is not this world. The self which has been awakened to being-oneself can accept and adopt this limitation, and fears more the loss of being-oneself which comes from attachment to objective substitutes (e.g., a party or the State) or by falling back into being-there; in a word, fears only to die without having lived. In Jaspers' view, imperfection, failure, fault inhere in the human situation as inescapably as death: not only is there in the human depths a destructive element, morbid or wild, but also success is never more than partial, in doing good I indirectly do evil, and my choice of myself in liberty is itself necessarily tainted in both attitude and content (for it is self-assertion and pride, which is the source of conflict, and it is made good in the adoption of a concrete situation which is riddled with imperfections). Such general limitations of the human condition like the limitations of my particular situation are the material out of which I make my life; they can be partially overcome by being actively accepted and used, but they are real checks and frustrations and bring it home to me that the absolute reality I seek, being-in-itself, is not to be found objectively realized in this world: that indeed although it can only be known in this world, it is not this world.

Thus the social ideal of human well-being completely and finally established, long and happy life without pain or privation, is dubious even as an ideal. Nietzsche was afraid that it was practicable, that modern ideas and technical success meant just this, and threatened to reduce mankind to a common level of green-meadow gregariousness, contentment, ease, security, and bovine mediocrity. Jaspers sees plainly enough the irregularity and intractability of life which defies any such smooth reduction to control and ever threatens catastrophe, and he is therefore able to accept the aim of social well-being as valid for social policy and therefore for individual effort, so long as more ultimate and secret ends and tasks which belong properly to persons in their solitude are not forsaken or sacrificed.

The State is the most formidable of all the objectivities which are indispensable but which enclose personal existence with the threat of lifeless emptiness. Because of its authority and power, as collective will manifesting the character of personal will with greater majesty, because of its appeal to the imagination with the call to great tasks and high destiny, because of its identifica-

tion with duty and high ideals and the sweets of virtue, shaming the private desires of the heart, its claim to transcend its members as a system transcends its elements (which reverses the truth) is hard to resist. The individual has somehow to come to terms with the State, to find his vocation and his destiny within it, and to find in himself the source of criticism of its aims and ideals and its actual policies. The validity of the State is not a prior and overriding validity, for it comes from those who in the consciousness of being-oneself have chosen their vocation and destiny and consistently with themselves give meaning and value to its aims and institutions, are able to treat them like ethical norms and laws as determinations which they give themselves in affirming themselves in liberty. The individual needs the State for becoming himself, and the State derives its validity from being-oneself; but there is tension as well as fertility in the relation. The State mediates the participation of the person in history. The individual does not get the meaning of his life from history; nevertheless, his life and activity have to make sense in the historical context, have to participate in the continuity of man's life. History is open, and the written record is not the last word. Even the authority of success, upheld by the finality of the past, cannot prevent the submerged possibilities from coming to the surface, from influencing the future.

Thus it is always necessary for being-oneself to assimilate the objectivity which it actively accepts; and this is what gives meaning and value to social policies and institutions and to the course of history. Being-oneself which would stand aside from objectivity, or remain on the edge, is sterile and self-destructive. But a happy marriage with objectivity is not always, perhaps seldom, possible. The heretic and the rebel warn us, exceptions though they are, of what the world is like, or what is possible and may be necessary. Nietzsche's *amor fati*, embracing our destiny, the existentialist's commitment and fidelity when he assumes his situation and his life and remains ever active and creative, although perforce resigned and frustrated: this being-oneself, the fruit of the choice of myself in liberty, is real because the other possibilities remain open, of which the mystic and the suicide are reminders. In such a world, which must be both accepted and refused, personal existence, being-oneself, can only be lived in the spirit of irony, humour, and modesty. The objective world, being-there, is not being-in-itself, the ultimate reality; but this reality is not to be looked for anywhere else, nor need it be abandoned as a hopeless quest. It is not revealed to consciousness in general, the subject to whom the public objective world is scientifically intelligible, nor is it revealed to pure subjective cultivating

state of mind, it is revealed to the subject who wills his relations with an objective world with the intention to transcend both subject and object, to gain in relation to being-there the transcendence of being-oneself and being-in-itself. This consciousness is modest because it is rare, playful and ironic because it sees that the world must be taken very seriously and its pretensions not too seriously. Neither idealism nor rationalism has this humour, for want of having broken the pretensions of the objective world. On the other hand, the irony of the existentialist is not the mockery of the sceptic nor the amusement of the spectator, for he suffers from the frustrations of this world and loves and seeks the being-in-itself which is hidden in its appearances.

My being awakened to liberty and self-choice, unconditioned being-oneself, is the doing of another, like christian salvation. At least my unconditioned self is oriented towards other unconditioned selves, requires and seeks communication with them, and being-oneself is not real without communication, as it is not real as empty liberty without manifesting itself in choice. My liberty posits and requires the liberty of everybody else. The formula is: "I will that each other shall be what I strive to become, that he be himself in sincerity and in truth." This appeal to the other is accompanied by self-revelation without reserve; one dares "to be naked" before the other: the formalities, conventions, and reserves of ordinary intercourse are inappropriate to communication at the level of being-oneself. This communication is not the sharing of what is in common, but the insistence on the singularity of each. It is therefore conflict, but a "loving struggle"; the struggle of beings who recognize themselves as united but have as a condition of their reality to assert and maintain their difference of faith and destiny. The truth of each is the truth of himself and for him there is no alternative, his uniqueness is a vital assimilation which is his alone: there is no other truth, but there is the truth of others. The "loving struggle" of communication is the corrective of the unavoidable arbitrariness in this necessary solitude of truth. Existences are linked by reason and in communication strive to bring themselves to the unity which they have by faith. The separation of time and place is never wholly overcome: truth remains multiple, a conflict of absolutes. Here again, there is frustration; but no relaxation of the effort to communicate. Communication is between persons who participate in a common world order and collaborate in common tasks, but communication does not reside in this intercourse, it springs from it. The other is constituted for me by my being fully myself, that is, by communication in the world of being-

oneself. Otherwise, he is another one like me and all others, an object and a means, a figure in the world, a rational consciousness identical with every other, and one who interests me only in so far as we envisage a common object or form a common thought universally valid. Love, "the absolute consciousness in its plenitude," is always possible, and always desired by the person awakened to being-oneself. Ideas which claim objective validity pass away, but "there are always the men with whom I am or can be in communication, and with them what is for me authentic being stands firm." Communication is not limited to contemporaries physically encountered; it is possible to seek and to touch authentic being-oneself in history, not necessarily the men of external greatness and success, but the men of faith, love, and imagination.

Communication, the most essential of existential tasks, is the most precious and the most fragile of all possible achievements.

IV

Being-there (the objective world known by observation and experiment), being-oneself (the person aware of his liberty, the unconditioned source of his being, and of his situation in history, and assuming and affirming himself in choice and decision), being-in-itself (the Transcendence of the world, manifested in the world, inseparable from it but not identical with it): these three modes of Being are in no sense reducible to one another. The person who is made aware of them may participate in all three; Transcendence embraces the world of objects and subjects: but the logical understanding, formed upon the objects of empirical existence, being-there, is unable without falsification to describe the other modes of existence or to relate them in a common system; their discontinuity is invincible, only to be reconciled in the life of a person and by faith in Transcendence. Philosophy can no longer naïvely attempt to treat the whole of Being as immanent in the logical understanding. Reason can attempt to clarify and fortify personal life in being-oneself, and to awaken it in others; and to awaken philosophic faith in Transcendence and to guide the perception of it. The whole effort of philosophy is to bring to me the presence and the silence of Transcendence, only accessible from the level of being-oneself. Indeed, being-oneself is, so to speak, itself only the place where one listens to the voice and the silence of Transcendence, a voice which speaks only riddles, a presence which is sometimes a plenitude and often a lack. The riddles can never be made universally plain to the general understanding; each personal existence can only read them for itself, and only for the moment, perpetually, never once

for all. Faith never becomes certainty, but the impulse to transcend is invincible; reason can never forsake the quest for unity and totality and never find them save in Transcendence; personal existence can only be satisfied with absolute existence, being-one-self with being-in-itself.

I am autonomous but not self-sufficient. In the dizzy consciousness of myself in liberty, I lean not only upon my actual situation in the world imposing its limits but also upon the Transcendence before which I stand; I stand in consciousness of my liberty before my concrete situation and before the enveloping situation which gives me my responsibility, my liberty: I am unconditioned, an absolute beginning, and doubly dependent. I actively accept my situation in the world and strive to transcend it, the objects before me, the limited ends I adopt, the hindrances to my will, and all ultimate frustrations. I will, myself, and am in that sense my origin; at the same time, I am given to myself, for I am, so to speak, commissioned to will myself, liberty is my situation in which I find myself, and that unconditioned self to which I return and in which I renew myself is my transcendence and my link with the Transcendence of the world as the ground of my being. Personal existence, being-oneself, which we can be, is one with Transcendence, being-in-itself, through which we are. When personal existence becomes sure of itself it becomes in the same operation sure of Transcendence. The unconditioned I, freed from determinations, standing in liberty, knows that I am autonomous but not self-sufficient, that I am doubly dependent, given to myself from a transcendental ground and in need of the limitations and determinations by which I choose myself, realize myself in the world.

My authenticity is in this autonomy, doubly dependent. There is no place in this philosophy for mysticism, for separation from the world and direct communion with God. If the term God (which savours of myth) is to be used, there is no God apart from the world, neither is the world God: God is both revealed and hidden in the world, and no effort to see His face can be finally successful nor finally baffled. One might perhaps say that the condition of looking steadfastly upon His face is continually to lose sight of it. Life is like that: its vitality withers unless it is perpetually renewed, and so soon as it seized in one form it slips into another; even the opposite; so that the paradox is often the best clue or the least inadequate formulation. Nothing is safe, once for all. The Transcendence of the world, the meaning of life, is found alike in frustration and failure and in consummate achievement; but it is not either, and it is not found in either if they remain what they are and are not cancelled and

transcended, without any final escape from the situation in which achievement is real and must be attempted, and frustration is bitter and failure a grief and a crisis to be dealt with. There is no respite from this tension of unconditioned action in the world, springing from myself in liberty and moving across the world to its limits, at any point or moment meeting the tangent of Transcendence, and striving to hold in steady contemplation the unity and transfiguration of the world.

Jaspers seeks to give to this refractory but veridical experience the clarification and formal validity of rigorous philosophical treatment, following through the thought in all its intricacy and ramification. The main phase of this treatment is the development of a doctrine of ciphers. The world is, so to speak, a secret text which can never be translated into plain language for all to read by the common light of general logical understanding. It is only accessible from the level of being-oneself and can only be deciphered by each for himself. "I live with the ciphers. I do not understand them but I steep myself in them. All their truth lies in the concrete intuition which fills them in a manner each time historical." Nevertheless, philosophy can help to make it easier, can elaborate a new objectivity, a second universe of objects which will indicate and illustrate the general truth of human experience. Such a task can only be tentative, and would mislead if it pretended to any precision of doctrine or method, for there is nothing which cannot be a cipher, and there can be no settled meaning for any; there is no code and no key. Nonetheless, the general experience of mankind has a testimony which reports on the enigmatical world, and this witness can be examined and interpreted for what it is worth. This testimony is given mainly in myths and religions and philosophies. They are not so much true as ciphers revealing the truth, not universal truth but special appropriations of the truth. Therefore the approach to them for this purpose is at the level of communication, not by the objective method of sociological classification. From the standpoint of philosophy, it is especially the history of philosophy that is the revelation of Transcendence and leads to the orientation of the present effort in philosophy: it is a ceaseless communication of the living philosopher with the philosophers of the past, who are thinkers living their lives and thinking in order to live well, not anonymous workers whose work is capitalized in results.

Myths, religions, and philosophies are ciphers at one remove from the ciphers of nature and history and personal existence. In poetry, in painting, and in the sciences, the natural world is itself often treated as a cipher, the indication of something other than

itself. Jaspers gives the example of Van Gogh. Leonardo, and, more explicitly, Wordsworth, might be examples even more to his point, the use of the imagination to invoke a world beyond the world of appearances but manifested in it. The poetic and the scientific treatment of nature may be profoundly philosophical, whereas the attempts at definitive readings of nature in philosophies of nature are unphilosophical, in the sense of pretending to give a knowledge which is no knowledge. Similarly, the philosophies of history which give a definitive reading of man's destiny are unphilosophical, whereas a reading of history which does not make a principle of success, but explores other possibilities and keeps the future open and seeks to touch in history the secret and authentic life of personal existence and to follow its vicissitudes, is philosophical and finds in history a cipher revealing Transcendence. The cipher *par excellence* is given in being-oneself: here through my finite self-determination in individual decisions and choice which dominates the stream of time and integrates events, and my participation in the general ideas which regulate thought and action, I manifest the union of liberty, nature, and history, and thus manifest Transcendence. My liberty embodied in my life in the world is the formula by which I read from within Transcendence in the world. But it is not the success, the happy realization of this union which I manifest that reveals Transcendence; it is the reality of it, the perpetual possibility and the perpetual frustration. This ultimate frustration is a cipher which cannot be interpreted: it is silence. The absolute is real only in the relative. There can only be faith in being-in-itself which sustains and orients the effort of being-oneself: and this faith is touched and tested at the limits of achievement and failure. The final word can never be said in any shape or form, and therefore the task remains and is worth while, and philosophy can point the way and save one from a failure of nerve.

The three orders of being limit, break, and interpret one another, and the fatal error is to take any one of them exclusively: each is irremediably false save in tension with the others. That is the clue to philosophy and to life. In Jaspers himself, the finality of self-affirmation (final only in recurrence), bruised and frustrated, is unqualified affirmation of Being, *amor fati*, standing for everything and embraced with the highest intensity of imagination and will.

V

Jaspers' philosophy is not a natural theology, but, so to speak, it takes the place of a natural theology. It is not a christian philosophy, but it is dealing philosophically with the elusive realities

dealt with cryptically in the sayings of Jesus. Jaspers' notion of Transcendence is not theistic, neither is it pantheistic. At the same time, it is not naturalistic nor anthropocentric. He explicitly, emphatically, and uncompromisingly rejects both religion and atheism. He rejects religion because it claims to be authoritative and to guarantee the experience of Transcendence, and because it stands for the possibility of direct experience of and communication with Transcendence, which can only be known out of and by means of the plenitude and deficiencies of life in the world. For Jaspers, Transcendence is a total view of the world, not from the station of Sirius as a spectator of all time and all existence, but by glimpses gained through participation in the life of the world by one who is eager to see and trained to look. Anything approaching separation from the world or the treatment of anything in the world as sacred or privileged is peremptorily rejected. At the same time, atheism is rejected because it denies the possibility of Transcendence, and because it proceeds to find substitutes which are too obviously faked. His criticism of Nietzsche is here much to the point. How shall one interpret the ultimate frustration which being-oneself encounters in the world? The option lies between despair, life in the world is not really possible, and the treatment of frustration as revealing the hidden secret of the world, and this option is only kept open by the possibility of faith in Transcendence which is inspired by irrecusable elements of our experience which the ciphers and our own will to affirm help us to interpret. The will to affirm, even in the acceptance of final frustration, is essential, although it cannot subsist on itself without the encouragement of real experiences. Nietzsche carries his nihilism to the extreme, says No to all that is accepted and valued, not wantonly but because he has to, but he does it in order really to be able to say Yes to existence with sincerity and assurance. But the terms in which he finds himself able to say Yes are puerile, crude notions taken from science, pseudo-science, and primitive metaphysics, to fake an atheist's Transcendence. Better, and unavoidable, the silence of Transcendence, the riddle of the ciphers. Thus Jaspers explicitly rejects idealism and positivism, revealed religion and atheism, materialism and hedonism; and at the same time finds a place and a partial justification for them all. The final word between them is not said and cannot be said. There is no trace of agnosticism here, still less of eclecticism; he takes an uncompromising position, one that is bound to give offence to all parties.

Jaspers tries to bring his ship safely through Scylla and Charybdis, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and we seem to find him cast first upon one and then upon the other. The obvious criticism

is that in choosing this passage he has doomed himself to founder; in particular, that his notion of Transcendence is an impotent substitute for the God of salvation, which in the ruined world which he gives us is a poor sort of joke. This criticism is far too easy, but his notion inevitably invites comparison with the God of theology and raises the question whether his interpretation of experience is not too deeply informed by christian conceptions to be capable of inspiring a positive humanism. Thus, in spite of himself, he gets pushed into the position of a platonic or hegelian idealism or of Anglican modernism, which proves sterile and provokes a return to christian doctrine or the passage to atheism. That is to go back to Kierkegaard or Nietzsche. Even if that were the effect of Jaspers' philosophy, all would not be as before. Jaspers' critique of science and of philosophy, his rejection of revealed religion and of reductive materialism, his insistence on action and the claims of practical life in the world, not as a duty or a commandment, not as *pis aller*, and not merely on utilitarian grounds, but steadfastly on philosophical grounds and for the sake of contemplation and absolute existence, his recognition of levels of existence and of their discontinuity as the clue to philosophy and authentic living, his sense of the extreme preciousness and precariousness of personal life and of the tensions, polarities, and relativities by which it is sustained: these are impossible without Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and are not to be found in either.

Even his notion of Transcendence is anyhow to be taken seriously. It is not a doctrine nor an argument, but an invitation to experience, and not solely a formal postulate of unity and totality absent from the world. Consider some of the many ways in which we do experience transcendence. The psychological tension of urgent situations, as in tragedy, moves us with a sense of implication: What is true that this can be possible? Thus Jaspers himself says, generalizing this consciousness, "Being is such that this empirical world is possible." In this way literature is a cipher, for it creates heightened situations which wring their implications from the responsive mind. Similarly, it is defect and deficiency that occasion ideals: justice is a cry. The obvious example of transcendence is in the quality of a complex whole which has a plus of integration which is more than the sum of its parts or the resultant of their interactions. No achievement is once for all: histories and biographies are never final nor superseded; themes may become hackneyed but can never be exhausted; on the one hand, life is for ever the same, on the other, it requires perpetual renewal. Thus everything actual, every realization, can never be more than a participation, pointing

beyond itself. There is the moral transcendence of time in an integrated life, or of the self in sacrifice; or there is the transcendence of the ethos of an age which outlasts historical destruction and influences the world. Finally, one thing taken seriously for itself is frequently the vehicle of another which transcends it, as a game may be transcended in the social intercourse; or when, in the stoic conception, life is played as a game, the content is indifferent, the style is all.

In a world alive with transcendence, in which nothing is wholly and solely itself, and in which that fact is a way of life and a source of hope, it may be impudent to impugn a philosophic faith in Transcendence as a piece of gratuitous metaphysics, a craving for the exploded notion and abandoned category of substance. At any rate the strenuousness of Jaspers' own faith compels respect: it is no cheap formula, and no indolent disinclination to count on the calculable; as with a wrestler, the issue is always uncertain and everything may turn on the tension of the moment. He is as stripped and lithe and trained as a greyhound, and his quarry as unexpected as the living hare. It is the tension of infinite alertness for the undreamed of that braces his pursuit of the vision of Transcendence. In this pursuit there can be no rules and techniques to relieve the strain. There is no question here of easy faith, what is in question is whether or not the fine edge is brittle, the elasticity overstretched and limp. To quit metaphors, perhaps misleading, for the dominant impression that Jaspers conveys is of the heroic intensity of an impassioned intelligence, for whom the tensions are real but dynamic and enduring: even if his doctrine founders as a philosophy, it succeeds as philosophy, as the vehicle of a movement of thought which is a man's life and carries essential recognitions able to inspire and enlighten new initiatives in the effort both to think and to live.

H. J. BLACKHAM

PACIFISM

CHILDHOOD is a time of crowded impressions. Many of them are blurred by the years and even forgotten altogether. But some stick in the mind and remain a lifetime. In my own experience I am thinking of one of such now.

I was a very young boy at the time, and being put to bed by an aunt I was told that if I wanted to grow tall I must stretch my legs out in bed. "Or else," she added, "you'll never make a soldier." But I consciously curled up in bed, and did so for a few years afterwards. For I had no wish to become a soldier . . .

I am a young man in my twenties now. The dark fear I once had of becoming a soldier has now transformed into a powerful dislike of militarism, and all that savours of regimentation and blind obedience, and—what is most prominent in my mind—of killing. This brings me, after preamble, to my theme, which is a consideration of pacifism.

During the recent war I served my period of national service in the coalmines. I had expected being put into uniform like other eligible young men; but circumstances intervened (happily, I think now) to make it otherwise. Like millions of others at the end of the war I cherished an illusion. I thought that good relations with Russia had been cemented during the common fight, and that the future held a great promise of world peace. How wrong we all were time has told.

Today the international horizon is gloomy; another world conflict must be reckoned a frightening possibility. With it goes the thought, "If war should again become a reality, what should be the attitude of a thinking and feeling human being?" It is a difficult problem, and the Pacifist Press does not make it easier.

Says the pacifist: "Organised killing is wrong in all circumstances." Now, considered as an ethical judgment, that is a statement that few will seriously contest. Studied in isolation from world facts, to kill one's fellow-men, not because you have any quarrel with them personally, but because they happen to wear a wrong uniform—the uniform of the nation with which one's own happens at the moment to be at hostilities—is a monstrous act; a wicked and unspeakable crime. And there is something insanely inconsistent about the law, which, in peacetime, makes it a capital offence to murder anybody, but which, in times of war, crowns the act with medals and glory, in proportion to how many members of a legally declared enemy nation one contrives to kill.

But the matter cannot be so isolated. It has to be considered

against the harsh background of the world in which we live. If a man comes at you murderously with a knife, in spite of yourself your instinct of self-preservation is likely to assert itself, and no one could blame you if you killed him first in self-defence. So it is when national communities are threatened with annihilation—or, at any rate, enslavement—by invading hordes. If our very lives and all that we hold vital and dear are on the point of being torn away from us, we should indeed be extraordinary creatures of the evolutionary process if we did not offer resistance.

The pacifist, however, takes no account of the conditions of the case. For him there is no justification in taking up arms. The method of force—military force—is always wrong no matter what the circumstances may be.

Speaking for myself, I respect his convictions; I share his abhorrence of war; I have his idealism. But idealism, by its definition, conceives a state of things that might, given certain conditions, come to be, but that is not yet a realised fact. If idealism is to have any influence upon human affairs it must perforce join hands at some point with realism. Now, my realism complicates the question and makes it not just a clear-cut moral issue, but in large measure one of expediency.

Inside any community there is need of a police force to protect the lives and property of the individuals who compose it, and to maintain law and order. It demands no considerable imagination to see what would happen in the absence of a law-maintaining body. Chaos and jungle lawlessness would be the inevitable concomitant.

This is largely the state of affairs that exists today internationally in the absence of a central, administrative, law-making authority *backed up by a law-maintaining police force.*

One never hears the pacifist objecting to the existence of the civil police force operating within a State. What the pacifist actually objects to, I suspect, is not restraining force *in itself*, but killing; and whilst a policeman within a State has rarely need to take life in the discharge of his duties as a law-maintainer, it would be ludicrous to suppose that in the international sphere the use of truncheons (instead of guns) would be adequate.

To me it seems that the pacifist makes his great mistake not so much in setting too great a store by the common human desire for peace, but in under-estimating the power (in the hands of a few men, in authoritarian countries) that the State wields over the lives of its citizens, and the forces producing that most explosive of modern evils—nationalism. And the pacifist's assumption that willingness to compromise and pacific methods can soften the spirit of aggressive dictators is naïvely

unrealistic. For it goes no way towards removing the menace of recurrent war. I think we have to recognise—no matter with what degree of reluctance—that force can only be met with and broken by force.

The abolition of war is a problem that demands a radical revision of prevailing ideas, held not only in this country but in all countries. We must have an over-all organisation of world forces shaping human destiny—political, economic, sociological, and ecological. And there is need of a considerable clearance of effete ideas in these fields, which have held sway too long. All the activities of man, in winning for himself food and clothing and shelter, must be seen against no narrow personal, sectional, or even national background, but against that of our world.

Nothing less than the reality of a world community of nations living under a common administration, and acting under a common code of international law, can stop war and bring to an end the ugly and frightful spectacle of men being trained to fight and kill each other. It is the loosest kind of thinking to imagine that there is any international code of law that has sufficient moral weight, unsupported by armed strength, for all to respect it. If there are any who think that, let them reflect upon the manifest ineffectiveness in forming the basis of a general peace of the League of Nations, and now UNO—so far. Those of us who are pacifists in spirit, if not in fact, know only too well that collective armed force — I stress collective — must perforce form the foundation of any genuine peace that we hope to achieve.

G. I. BENNETT

REVIEWS

THE PARADOX OF OSCAR WILDE. By George Woodcock. T. V. Boardman and Co., Ltd., 15s. net.

Many books have been written about Oscar Wilde, but we have reached a stage at which we can do without all but a very few of them. If Hesketh Pearson has not written the last biography of Wilde that is likely to be written, he has certainly written the best that has been published to date. With the aid of that careful and sympathetic biography and *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (dealt with at some length in *The Plain View*, October, 1948), the general reader who is acquainted with Wilde's works should be able to form a sensible opinion about the man and his place in our literature and life. But it is, alas, still quite common to find many apparently well-informed and intelligent people who are suffering from a sort of intellectual "hang-over" about Wilde—one caused by the debauch of misrepresentation and calumny which started even before the famous trials, and sank to the lower depths of human ingenuity during the years which followed. From a period of at first total and then partial eclipse, both tainted with ignominy, Wilde has at last emerged. Not only has he emerged cleaner than his detractors and enemies, but the passage of time has cleared the air sufficiently for an unprejudiced and objective elucidation and evaluation to be attempted of the factors which combined to form the character of a man who has puzzled two generations of commentators.

This is the task that George Woodcock set himself in writing *The Paradox of Oscar Wilde*. He has approached it with honesty, sincerity, a dialectical method—and great industry. The result is one of the few books we need keep on our shelves about Wilde. It is above all things an honest and sincere book. It does quite definitely elucidate obscurities and seeming contradictions, and it ends with a balanced assessment of the man's achievement, and an estimate of his place to-day in our literature.

The book consists of a series of essays under three broad headings: early life and factors contributing towards the formation of Wilde's character and outlook; Wilde's æstheticism, conversational talents and writings; and the final assessment of values. Seven drawings by Beardsley, Toulouse-Lautrec and others enliven the work.

George Woodcock's main contention is that Wilde's was a dual personality in which there were two distinct currents of feeling and thought which must give to any account of his work the quality of paradox. Wilde was both the witty, flippant cynic

and a man of great sincerity and wisdom. This seems quite obvious from his life, his conversation and his written work. The idea of separating the two currents and analyzing each, contrasting one with the other, and then attempting to reconcile them in a final picture is certainly one which yields excellent fruit in the telling. The only quarrel one can have with it is the verdict of "dual personality." For, to anybody acquainted with Irish character—and Wilde, though never an intense nationalist was as Irish by nature as the Bog of Allen—it is almost a commonplace that Irish people enjoy (or suffer from) a very similar sort of "dual personality" which expresses itself in their conversation, their behaviour and, if they are writers, in their written works. The present is not a particularly bright moment in which to test the validity of this assertion, but we have still with us such writers as James Stephens and Bernard Shaw who can, with a combination of sincerity and what often seems like flippancy or sheer cynicism, propound wise ideas. To drop a little lower in the scale, the same sort of qualities are to be found in the conversation of almost any Irish people, especially when the audience happens to include receptive English listeners who so greatly enjoy the fireworks that as a rule they willingly allow themselves to succumb to the spell. Where Wilde differs from the average is that he had an overdose of the qualities in question, found himself living in England where they were more appreciated than in Dublin, and allowed himself to be carried away by them into excesses of *living them* which not only shocked the bourgeois but made many of them hate him. His seems to be a case of the sin of hubris rather than one of dual personality. In attempting to *épater les bourgeois* he did not know where to draw the line, a besetting sin of the mentally liberated Irish.

That the circumstances of Wilde's birth and upbringing in the strange, untidy but very able and intellectual parental household, with the tradition of his kinsman the Gothic novelist and genius of literary horror Charles Maturin in the background, and his association with the snob of snobs John Pentland Mahaffy (who impressed him with the importance of Greece and the fact that conversation can be an art), rounded off by the teachings of the solemn Walter Pater and the somewhat fantastic Ruskin, were influences contributing to the formation of his character need not be doubted. But without the astonishing receptiveness of Wilde's mind for those things which he believed would enable him to dramatize himself to best advantage, such influences could easily have been wasted. Viewed in this light, one appreciates the man who enjoyed and courted continual variety. But are there really so many "contradictions" in it all? Having set himself at an

early age to provide answers to all the questions—and in a form to startle, shock or at least interest the listener or reader—he changed very little throughout his *vie épatante*. He merely developed—until the climax was reached. George Woodcock shows that this development pursued a fairly fixed and almost inevitable course; and the dual personality theory does not add much to the elucidation.

In his attempt to deal fairly with Wilde's work and achievements Mr. Woodcock at times draws attention to the worst that he can find and then provides the severest interpretation. This process is often carried to rather ridiculous extremes as, for example, when he quotes a commonplace and even slipshod passage from Wilde's prose and puts it for comparison alongside one of Walter Pater's purple patches and concludes that the latter is better writing, adding that Oscar was "painfully aware of his failure to approach Pater's ability." Perhaps there is justification in such a book as this for pointing out the worst in Wilde's writing, but who is there who would not prefer a page of Wilde at his best to a page of Pater at his best? Then there is the curious statement: "The narrow Irish Protestantism of Portora Royal School perhaps helped to create his later sympathy for the Roman Church." Mr. Woodcock cannot know that, among Irish public schools, Portora has enjoyed a reputation for religious and political toleration, and a much younger old boy than the present writer has written of its "almost pagan liberty"—the fact being that there has always been a number of Roman Catholics on the school roll, and there could never be any "narrow Protestantism" because the roll of boarders and day-boys at the School has always had representatives of the principal Protestant sects. If Portora had any influence on Wilde's later sympathy for Catholicism—and one doubts it—it might just as easily have been that the "almost pagan liberty" he enjoyed there helped him to appreciate the paganism in Catholicism!

But the later part of the book is so excellent and so balanced in its assessment of Wilde's place in our life and in European literature generally that one can forgive such aberrations as those quoted. George Woodcock does a great service in clarifying and emphasizing the importance to us of Wilde's *message*, which stresses the value of individualism and the development of self. One does not think of Wilde as a man with a message; but it is there. And to those of us who live in an age in which we are all card-indexed, controlled, and conditioned from cradle to grave by the State, such a message is of the highest social importance.

CHARLES DUFF

MAN FOR HIMSELF. An enquiry into The Psychology of Ethics. By Erich Fromm. Kegan Paul, 12s. 6d.

The importance of this book lies chiefly in the fact that a psychologist should try to do what Erich Fromm tries to do in it. He takes up the tradition of humanistic ethics, from Aristotle and Epicurus through Spinoza and Dewey, and asks the question what a human being ought to be. He believes that the methods and findings of modern psychology are able to help in giving a better grounded answer to this question than has yet been given, because they have increased our understanding of the workings of human personality.

But, "in spite of the great possibilities which psycho-analysis provides for the scientific study of values, Freud and his school have not made the most productive use of their method for the enquiry into ethical problems; in fact they did much to confuse ethical issues. The confusion arises from Freud's relativistic position, which assumes that psychology can help us to understand the motivation of value judgments but cannot help in establishing the validity of the value judgments themselves." In this he maintains that Freud was wrong because the findings of psychology throw light on what a person could and should become as well as on the various types of neurotic personality. Freud only analyzed neurotic characters, which, according to Fromm, he and his followers did exhaustively and accurately; they never analyzed the mature, "productive," integrated type of character. This is what Fromm sets out to do as a contribution to ethics, because he feels we need to-day to regain a grasp of the ideal personality and society towards which we must try and develop. He tries also to show that his "productive" personality is the fulfilment of man's true capacities, whilst all other "orientations" are perversions arising from frustrations of natural capacity, and thus to provide justification for value judgments. In this he does undoubtedly support and illuminate our value judgments, but he also falls into the trap of trying to escape from a simple value judgment altogether.

What he calls the "productive orientation" is one in which the person is dominated by love and reason. He carefully defines love as care, responsibility, respect and knowledge. "Reason" as used by him seems almost to mean the cognitive side of love since its function is "to understand, to grasp, to relate oneself to things by comprehending them, to discover their essence and their deeper meanings."

Throughout the book he analyzes and attacks authoritarian ethics and the type of conscience developed by submission to

authority, and he claims that Freud only analyzed this type of internalized authority or authoritarian conscience. He claims that there is another type of conscience which emerges from our own experience of the proper use of our own capacities to love and reason and act creatively, and from our experience of love and reason and creative work in others.

This is the humanistic conscience which condemns us when we betray what we ourselves feel to be our highest potentialities. One of the weakest spots in the book is perhaps the account of the humanistic conscience; the terms are too vague and unconvincing but nevertheless the conception is vital and undoubtedly corresponds to a strand, at least, in human life. The author properly recognizes that even the humanistic conscience is partially shaped by the society in which it develops.

In attacking authoritarian ethics, the book again and again asserts that man must be what it is best for him himself to be and not what serves the purpose of another being, whether God or Dictator. This of course is the title theme. The humanistic conscience is our consciousness of what we have it in us to be, criticizing us for crippling ourselves or others by our actions.

One of the interesting themes of the book is the assertion that love of others and love of self go together and that self-hatred goes with hatred of others. The assertion that hatred of others goes with self-hate seems hardly adequately substantiated, and the idea that selfishness is compensation for lack of love of self seems more a play on words than anything else.

There is value, however, in the idea that we are not called upon simply to frustrate ourselves and that, if we do, it will probably poison our power to love and understand. And yet there is something facile about the avoidance of the problem which arises from the need to exercise painful restraint or to make painful or disastrous exertions for the sake of others or society. This is all too easily glossed over under the conception of "productive" character in which our impulses find creative fulfilment and in which we find joy and happiness. A similar flaw vitiates the excellent argument that we have no specifically evil instincts, such as a destructive impulse, that these only develop as a result of failure to find expression for our harmless natural capacities, that they are perversions. This argument does not face the fact that our natural impulses to do, get and keep what we want have to be restrained on every hand out of considerations of fairness and kindness or even of health and safety. The demands made upon us are trying and exasperating, such as only love and public spirit can endure without frustration and resentment. Apart from

secondary perversions our natural impulses have sometimes to be restrained and this is a basic fact of which account must be taken.

This work of Fromm's should be welcomed by all who live by a humanist ethic and feel within them a humanist conscience. The psychologists have done so much to create the impression that all goodness is bogus goodness and all conscience is a suspicious mechanism developed in us in our helpless early years, that all restraint creates vicious disguised impulses, and so on. It is a great thing to find a psychologist seriously analyzing the nature of true goodness and the nature of a well grounded conscience. It is a great thing to find a psychologist recognizing that we can be full of uncensorious and sympathetic understanding for the inherited temperament and harmful conditions which have made people what they are without being in the least weakened in our value judgments or being deprived of that grain of responsibility which is all we need to make us free and moral beings. It is only a pity that Fromm tries to make psychology do the impossible and provide a complete factual justification for our value judgments. It is also a pity that he overworks his catchword "productive," as though it provided an unassailable conception of all that is truly good. There is nothing more unassailable and scientific or even more suggestive and revealing about the word "productive," used as Fromm uses it, than there is about the word good. In fact it is open to misconception and misuse, as he himself realizes. It is only when he develops detailed aspects of his "productive" orientation that we see he means by it things we know to be good, including inward modes of experiencing what can not be altered, and then he actually throws light upon the nature of a good personality.—

VIRGINIA FLEMMING

SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR ALL: ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLAND. By H. C. Dent. Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 224, 8s. 6d.

Readers with a taste for the history of education will find in the first part of this book a well-documented account of the reforms which have led up to the present situation. Mr. Dent describes in considerable detail the various measures which British governments have taken to improve the nation's schools both before and since the creation, in 1899, of the Board of Education. Of most of these he writes with approval and even enthusiasm; but he deplures the too exclusive concentration in the first decade of this century on the provision of secondary education of the grammar school type for those qualified to benefit by it who would

otherwise have missed it; he thinks that this resulted in unjustifiable delay in tackling the more important task of providing secondary education for *all*.

Part II of Mr. Dent's book is entitled "Some Outstanding Problems." In a chapter on "Purpose and Objectives" he praises the Norwood Report (1943) for recongizing more explicitly than is sometimes done that among the possibilities of human personality "some are worthy to be developed, some are not." The best statement of the function of secondary education known to him he finds in an American report drawn up in 1937 by a department of the U.S. National Education Association: it maintains an attractive balance between social and personal values.

On the subject of "Age of Entry" Mr. Dent is somewhat unorthodox. On the basis of his own experience he advocates a "diagnostic period" of two years, 11 to 13 or 12 to 14, before the secondary course proper begins. He realizes that a common curriculum for all during these years is not practicable, and thinks that a certain amount of "dabbling" is valuable at this stage. He holds that the division into academic and unacademic types of mind is more fundamental than the tripartite division into grammar school, technical school and modern school pupils which is in use at present—in his opinion on inadequate psychological grounds. He would like to see an increase in the number of multilateral schools.

It seems strange, in view of the author's awareness of the variety of human nature, that he should argue the questions of co-education and boarding-schools as if definitive answers could, and should, be found to them by further scientific research. Would not uniformity of practice in these two matters be an undesirable solution?

In Part III, "Suggestions for Advance," the author develops further his view that there should be a "pause for diagnosis" on entry to the secondary school, to discover in the first place "whether the child's dominant interest is in people, things or ideas." As in his earlier book *A New Order in English Education* (1942) he calls for a closer educational supervision of apprenticeship schemes: employment should be treated as far as possible as part of a youth's education, and return to whole-time education in suitable cases should be made far easier than it is at present.

Mr. Dent points out that *some* of the aims proposed for the new "modern" secondary schools are such as ought to be pursued in *all* secondary education. Those which are peculiar to these schools, because intended to develop unacademic minds, are certainly urgent: grammar school training, partly because it is the readiest

to hand, is being thrust upon many of the young who can gain very little of value from it. Teaching ability combined with sufficient initiative to deal effectively with changing needs is rare: it is much to be hoped that enough will be forthcoming to make a success of the new "modern" secondary schools, whether as independent units or as departments of comprehensive schools.

F. C. ADE

EVERYDAY SEX PROBLEMS. By Norman Haire, Ch.M., M.B. Pp. 259. Frederick Muller, 10s. 6d.

Dr. Haire is widely known for a lifetime's work in cultivating and propagating reasonable views and practices in the field of human sexual relations. His new book is a further selection from articles he contributed regularly to an Australian magazine for women. The subjects of his weekly articles were determined by the problems of his readers and correspondents or by the news of the day, and over a period of time they covered all the common problems and aspects of sex, and continually returned to those which are central in importance or in common preoccupation. He explains in an Introduction that the state of public opinion in Australia did not permit a full expression of his own personal views in dealing with these topics, and that while he has said nothing that he does not believe to be true, there is much that he believes to be true which he has not said in these articles. He follows this statement with a recital of some of the main articles of his belief.

Whether one agrees with Dr. Haire's own views or not (and disagreement at once raises the question of how far our own knowledge of the facts is equal to Dr. Haire's), a reasonable mind must be grateful to him for two qualities of the first importance which he brings to the discussion of these questions: he is all the time appealing to reason and attending to the facts. This may seem elementary, and it ought to be so, but even at this time of day and in this country it is much rarer than we like to think. From first to last in these articles Dr. Haire not only writes lucidly, seriously, and persuasively, but also conveys the contagion of his own reasonableness: he is not only instructing the public, popularising useful information, at a high level of professional restraint, but equally he is educating the public in these matters, penetrating to their attitudes and methods, informing their outlook and approach.

Dr. Haire is an advocate of early marriage, and, in consequence, of divorce by mutual consent or of some form of trial marriage. Anybody who knows what the alternatives are, not in theory but

in current practice, will not be inclined to argue with him from abstract principle. Incidentally, he remarks, "It has taken us a good many centuries to get into the present mess, and it is going to take us a long time to get out of it." One has no right to press a remark that is so much by the way, but it does seem to imply the conception of both a golden age in the past and a utopia in the future, whereas it does not seem likely that any society has been or will be wholly successful in regulating sexual relations. Were it so, however, there is no excuse whatever for not doing everything possible to cure and to prevent the palpable evils that abound. Since the most creative factor in the whole situation is an enlightened public opinion, the work of a publicist who is also a specialist, who knows the facts, the medical facts as well as the human facts, and who brings a reasonable mind to the straightforward, educative discussion of these questions and problems is of the greatest service.

H.J.B.

THE STORY OF THE R.P.A., 1899-1949. By A. Gowans Whyte. Watts, 5s.

This year the Rationalist Press Association celebrated its jubilee. Nobody is so well qualified as Mr. Gowans Whyte to tell the inner story of its development from the beginnings, for he has been in it all through; he was a pioneer and is a moving spirit. Besides this he is a practised journalist, conducting his narrative with skill and keeping its proportions, giving us the essentials in description and documentation from the origins through the phases of expansion to the present threshold of new hopes and ambitions. Beginning with the agreeable sensations of a dingy printing office (as romantic to some as the smell of grease paint to others), we come at the end to a long list of distinguished Honorary Associates, with a postscript sketch of the future and an appeal for support. The achievement in itself and the social changes to which it contributed are liable to be taken for granted at this time of day, and Mr. Gowans Whyte has set out in this commemorative volume a simple and timely reminder of what was done and what it cost, for the new generation which has arisen that knew not the great men to ponder with respect and with gratitude.

H.J.B.

CORRESPONDENCE

Marxism, Past and Present

It is difficult to conduct controversy with any show of amenity with people who conclude their letters by labelling us "impudent, untrue, irresponsible, dishonest and mischievous." My thirty-four years' work in the Freethought Movement are a sufficient answer to Mr. Price's abuse.

He will not, it seems, allow me to answer attacks on Marxism by citing the actual words of Marx, Engels, Lenin or Stalin. Then what sort of answer does he require? It is as if an ignoramus attacked Darwin for having said that men had sprung from chimpanzees. I should in such a case point out that Darwin said no such thing. The critic, if he were at all like Mr Price, would then complain that I "contented myself with quotations from books," and reinforce his point with sneers about "holy writ!" Really, when will these people learn to keep to a point?

"Everyone knows" is a time-honoured way of introducing some statement which nobody knows, but many people assert. If the Communist Party the world over had been so silly as to "abuse and condemn" all who differed from it, obviously the Party would never have succeeded in winning support, let alone leading a revolution anywhere. A party which stakes the future on the workers of the world uniting cannot without sheer idiocy proceed to abuse and condemn all those outside its ranks. A little history (as opposed to gutter journalism) would assist in Mr. Price's education.

Mr. Price offers us the portentous discovery that "Marxism is only one among many human faiths in which thought and action have been synthesised." So what? No one ever pretended that Marxism had no links with previous philosophies. I myself point out the contrary in *Man His Own Master*. I point out in particular that this opposition, between armchair epistemology and theory that includes practice, permeates the whole history of philosophy from Plato and Epicurus on. Let Mr. Price read me before reviling me.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

NOTES

The leader of the Communist Party in Italy, Signor Togliatti, contributes a preface to a new Italian reprint of Voltaire's *Treatise on Toleration*. He treats Voltaire's argument as an exceedingly effective offensive action in the circumstances of the time; whereas the sophistications of modern intellectuals who preach or practise toleration manifest the cultural decadence which has helped to restore clerical obscurantism and fanaticism. The thesis of toleration, says Togliatti, can only be sustained if one respects the doctrinal bases of other systems of thought. Certainly, if that is the only foundation, the building must be narrow and can accommodate few.

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Undoubtedly at the present time Catholicism is the strongest political force in western Europe. Undoubtedly there are highly placed and influential Catholics who hope and scheme for a complete come-back of the Church, a restoration of Christendom, and who for that reason are anxious to force the issue with Communism and destroy the middle parties and groups (whom they fear more). These middle groups are in a position to influence Catholic policy decisively if they collaborate closely enough. There is intellectual perception of this truth, but is there a common faith on which to base political action?

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Catholic political theory is nearer to socialism than to capitalism, and is most hostile to liberalism; it favours a society regulated by status rather than by contract. Thus Catholic power is favoured by the tendencies of the age.

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It is impossible to subscribe to a theory of art for art's sake if one has just been studying any considerable period of artistic creation.

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One is used to the exaggerated estimate on the Continent of, say, Byron or Shelley; but the persistent authority of Herbert Spencer shakes one's faith in the possibility of a common culture such as the 18th century believed in, and enjoyed. There is far more than we willingly recognize that is arbitrary, accidental, irrelevant in even the most solid parts of culture. Intellectual positions are as precarious as taste.

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